

From the Archives

The Tet Attack

General Nguyen Hue made his plans carefully. The foreigners were holding the cities of his beloved Vietnam, but he was not about to despair. Although vastly outnumbered, the Vietnamese general felt that a surprise attack against the foreigners occupying his land could be successful. When could maximum surprise be attained? As he thought this over, he considered Tet.

Tet is the great holiday of the Vietnamese year. Officially the start of the Chinese lunar new year, it is a grand religious, patriotic, vernal, and family holiday rolled into one. It is also everyone's birthday. The week-long celebration was a national holiday and customarily a time for family reunions. In previous years, even the war had abated during that week for a holiday cease-fire.

Such a diverting relaxation of tension could also mean a relaxation of vigil. To General Hue, it looked like the ideal time to launch his surprise attack. His soldiers, disguised as peasants returning home for family reunions and celebrations, had no trouble infiltrating enemy lines. Weapons were concealed in carts filled with flowers for the forthcoming festivities, as the Vietnamese troops slowly worked their way into position for the surprise attack.

At a preplanned signal, during the height of the Tet celebration, General Hue launched his surprise attack. He achieved a great success—one of the most signal victories ever won by Vietnamese forces.

And that's the way it was on 29 January 1789, as the Vietnamese liberated Hanoi from the Chinese.

Source: Richard J. Sommers, ed., *Vignettes of Military History, Volume III* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army Military History Research Collection, now the US Army Military History Institute, February 1982), Vignette No. 110, contributed by then-Colonel Donald C. Odegard, drawn from Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet* (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1978).